

SEVERE PLIGHT OF NURSERYMEN

FROM A CORRESPONDENT

OUR gardens have no doubt suffered considerably during this atrocious winter, but the plight of the nurserymen is really desperate. For about two months they have been unable to lift and dispatch any plants, and indeed I know of many people who have been nursing bundles of roses and other shrubs with their roots in boxes of damp peat, because they arrived after the freeze-up started, and could not even be heeled in outside.

As soon as lifting is possible, the nurserymen will undoubtedly work with frantic determination to get the orders away in time for spring planting. So when the thaw comes, let us remember they will have a backlog of many weeks' work, and telephoning or writing to the nurseryman only delays him more in his efforts to get the plants moving. But we are hearing reports now of much damage in nurseries as in gardens from rabbits and hares. Wire-netting protection that would be high enough in normal years has proved useless when snow has drifted three or four feet high, enabling the rabbits and hares to enter the nurseries, and this they have done with disastrous results to many trees and shrubs.

Plans for New Hedges

Those of us who made plans for planting new hedges, shrub borders, and the like may at least console ourselves that we shall have three to four weeks extension to the normal spring planting season. Spring will surely come in slowly, the ground will be wet, and the nursery stock will not be nearly so advanced in growth as it would be in a normal March or April. So one should be able to go on planting much later than would be normal. The proviso must be added that, should the weather turn in dry, we must be prepared to water and mulch plants to see them safely through their first summer. In fact, if these precautions are taken it may well be that we shall get better results with evergreen plants than if we had put them in during the dormant season. Spring planting is always to be recommended for evergreens, especially those which are normally sold out of pots, as there is less danger of them being damaged by frost before their root systems are fully established.

There are many hardy plants which are traditionally grown in pots by the nurserymen and can be planted at any time during the summer if watering facilities are available. The lovely tree paeonies for example, which are now becoming much more popular, come to mind, and with these plants it is desirable to put them in deeply enough so that the union on the stem, where the variety was grafted on to the root stock, is about 6 in. below the level of the ground. This encourages what is known as scion rooting—the production of roots from the part of the stem above the graft, and a much more vigorous plant will result more quickly than if the paeonies were planted with the union at ground level or above.

We must not confuse the tree paeonies with the hardy herbaceous types. These

should never be deeply planted—the dormant buds should not be more than an inch below the ground during the winter, otherwise they may fail to flower, and if paeonies have, over the years, become more shy with their flowers, it may be that through cultivations, top dressing and so on the plants have become too deeply buried.

Then we have such beautiful escallonias as the hardy 'C. F. Ball', genistas of all kinds including that magnificent First Class Certificate species *Genista lydia* which covers its dome-shaped clumps with masses of golden flowers in June or July; the ornamental ivies, and very often hydrangeas of various kinds. The cypripedium, too, and cistuses, are usually grown in pots, and clematis are almost invariably grown in this way.

If one wishes to plant something really out of the ordinary, that will intrigue every visitor, *Desfontainia spinosa* will fit the bill very well. It makes a neat plant with glossy, holly-like leaves, and red and gold tubular flowers. It grows slowly but is normally a long lived plant.

Berrying Shrubs

It is usually possible to obtain pyracanthas and cotoneasters, those most excellent of berrying shrubs, out of pots, and for covering walls, fences, pergolas, and the like, honeysuckles, passion flowers, wisterias, and ornamental vines can be planted at any time.

Soon we shall be hearing of the full toll winter has brought to the borderline plants—the ceanothus, some of the less hardy cistus, and escallonias, and it will be most interesting to see how many of the hardy fuchsias that have survived the recent winters have managed to struggle through to see the summer of 1963.

There are plenty of other plants that are normally grown in pots, besides the trees and shrubs. Virtually all the alpine plants are grown in this way, so are the hardy pinks, and even though it may mean recasting our ideas a little, we should not despair of being able to carry on with our garden making, even though for one reason or another we have not been able to put in all the trees and shrubs normally lifted from the open nursery that we had planned to plant this spring.

FIELD SPORTS

IT is still too early to be able to make any long-term assessment of the effects of the prolonged spell of cold weather this winter. But so far as deer in Southern England are concerned, an early, mild spring would bring the beasts back into condition quickly, whereas cold, dry conditions such as were experienced last spring would make the death of many deer, now on the borderline of semi-starvation, fairly certain. It is to be expected that the fawn crop of roe in particular will be poor. Experiments in the United States have shown that a low level of feeding during pregnancy coupled with prolonged cold weather both reduces the level of live births and the chances of a fawn surviving the first month of life.

Fortunately, the hardest frosts occurred early in the new year, when roebucks were not showing a great length of velvet, and no cases have so far been reported of frostbite to the new



Tree paeonies are among the aristocrats of the garden.

I would, however, emphasize the value of a permanent water supply for newly planted trees and shrubs not only in their first vital summer but in the following few years when they are making their new growth. We garden on light, quick-draining soil, and have over the years installed a permanent system using Alkathene pipe and various types of sprinkler chosen to cover variously shaped beds and borders. Our friends and neighbours who have been planting shrubs in the past few years, just as we have done, have been frequently amazed at the amount of growth our plants have made compared with their own, which have received only natural rainfall. I must hasten to add that for years past now we have mulched all our borders heavily with, at first, bark fibre, but when this disappeared from the market we turned to sawdust and have had excellent results. A ton of sawdust will put a mulch two inches thick over about 144 square yards, and if a handful of sulphate of ammonia is scattered per square yard on to the saw-

dust this will take care of any danger of denitrification which might otherwise exist. Personally, I have never noticed any signs of denitrification when using sawdust as a mulch, even when we have inadvertently failed to put on the sulphate of ammonia. But when fresh sawdust, or any other cellulose waste, is dug into the ground then denitrification, with the consequent yellowing of leaves, almost invariably takes place. If nitrogen is added, and for digging in the correct quantities to be safe are about 1cwt. sulphate of ammonia to one ton of sawdust, there should be no trouble.

So, with the thought that we will probably be able to plant trees and shrubs lifted from the open two to four weeks later this year than normally, that there are many hardy plants obtainable from pots throughout the summer, and if we can provide water and a mulch of sawdust, bracken, straw, or other material, we should be able to repair the damage the winter has inevitably caused, and carry on with our planting schemes.

Deer Struggle to Survive

FROM A CORRESPONDENT

antler growth, a phenomenon not unknown in central Europe. It is, however, likely that antler growth will not in general be up to average this year, and those interested in the study of roe should not be led to make the error later in the year of assuming that a particular buck is going back from extreme age, when in fact his poor headgear this season will be replaced by a better set under what one hopes will be kinder conditions next winter.

Behaviour of roe in the unusually arctic conditions has been interesting, both to the forester and the naturalist. In the days following heavy snowfall, deer were to be found under the thickest cover. It was only when natural food began to run short in these areas that they were forced to struggle through the thick, crusted snow to forage more widely. Food preference was markedly for ivy, followed by holly, bramble, and hazel shoots. It was only



Gardening.

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The Times (London, England), Saturday, Feb 23, 1963; pg. 11; Issue 55633. (1271 words)

Category: Arts and Entertainment

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Gale Document Number:CS184771671